AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A combination of piston and piston ring, comprising:

a piston having a piston ring groove in which at least the piston ring groove is made of steel, said piston reciprocally moving in a cylinder bore;

a piston ring made of ~~cast iron~~flake graphite cast iron, spheroidal graphite cast iron, white cast iron, malleable cast iron, vermicular graphite cast iron or alloy cast iron having an elastic modulus ranging from 130000 to 170000 MPa, and fitted into the piston ring groove; and

a hard coat film formed to at least an outer peripheral sliding surface of the piston ring.

2 – 3. Cancelled (without prejudice or disclaimer).

4. (Original) A combination of piston and piston ring according to claim 1, wherein said hard coat film is an ion-plating film.

5. (Original) A combination of piston and piston ring according to claim 1, wherein said piston ring is subjected to a nitriding treatment.

6. (New) A combination of piston and piston ring according to claim 1 wherein said combination of piston and piston ring is a combination of piston and piston ring for an internal combustion engine.

7. (New) A combination of piston and piston ring according to claim 6 wherein said internal combustion engine is a diesel engine.

8. (New) A combination of piston and piston ring according to claim 4 wherein said combination of piston and piston ring is a combination of piston and piston ring for an internal combustion engine.

9. (New) A combination of piston and piston ring according to claim 8 wherein said internal combustion engine is a diesel engine.

10. (New) A combination of piston and piston ring according to claim 5 wherein said combination of piston and piston ring is a combination of piston and piston ring for an internal combustion engine.

11. (New) A combination of piston and piston ring according to claim 10 wherein said internal combustion engine is a diesel engine.

12. (New) A piston and piston ring assembly adapted for reciprocating movement in a cylinder of an internal combustion engine, said assembly comprising:

a cylindrical piston having a circumferential piston ring groove made of steel;

a cast iron piston ring fitted within said groove; and

a hard coat film formed on at least a radially outer peripheral surface of the cast iron piston ring for reciprocating sliding surface engagement with said cylinder.

13. (New) A method for reducing the tendency of a piston ring to adhere to a steel piston ring groove in a reciprocating piston of an internal combustion engine, said method comprising:

applying a hard coat film to at least an outer peripheral sliding surface of a cast iron piston ring; and

fitting said surface-coated cast iron piston ring into said steel piston ring groove.